


## A WORD FROM THE MOUNTAINS

NE allows to the flight of wild pigeons, darkening the sky for days, a prescience germinating singly in each bluish breast at the same hour, as gilies blow in instant myriads upon the spur of spring. Wild geese clang upward from the Tulares as recurrently as grapes ripen in the wood at the set time of the year; but when men begin to sway together, to move in companies and exhibit in widely scattered parts froth of the same churning desires, we are far to seek for the cause of it: usurpations, extortions, Pentecost or Judgment of God. It is all devil or Holy Ghost. So the Franciscans laid the mutinies, fallings off, and infringements of the savages to the first mentioned; even so the tribes braved themselves for such trespass by commerce with their disused gods. No doubt the god of the water-fowl and

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the wood pigeons would have served as well in either case.

About the middle of the month of waning bloom the free Indians drew to cover in the stony winding gullies of the mountains, about forty true born and a half-dozen mestizos and mongrels, led by Urbano, who had Mascado for his right hand. They made medicine daily; smoke of council fires went up by night, and the click of rattles sounded through the wood with singing and exultation. The presage of their triumph rose like an exhalation from their camps, and settled over the Missions, where thousands of their blood had taken on the habits of a gentler life, swung censers for medicine sticks, had scapulars for fetiches, and prayed to the One God prefigured in a wooden doll. If the new faith went deeper it was not so deep that the roll of the ceremonial drums struck no chord under it. After the news of the skirmish at Las Chimineas, the neophytes kept close. By all accounts only rabbits and appointed couriers ran on the road between Soledad and Monterey, but the wood began to leak. Hints of distraction crept into



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the Missions; old men had glittering eyes and talked cautiously in corners. Scraps of news with no mouth to father them drifted from Carmelo to the town and were guaranteed by courier two or three days later. It was whispered that Marta had news of her son, for whom she kept a candle burning before San Antonio and the Child. She went that day walking over from Monterey, and took away the candle from the little altar of Carmelo; she may have thought the saint inattentive, or perhaps that her son did well enough for himself where he was. She went straight to the blessed candle, snuffed it out, and hid it in her bosom. Unprecedented behavior! None saw her but an altar ministrant who dared nothing by way of interference; the chief's daughter had a commanding walk, and the manners of royalty grew upon her in those days. Her eyes were bleak with memories, at other times bright and hot. She would be about the house crooning old songs, and would fall into set, unconscious stares. Of evenings they heard her chant low and wildly when the moon was up and a light wind came in from the sea. The sound of her singing mixed

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with the strumming of Don Valentin's guitar, and pierced Jacinta like a call from the wild. Then she wearied of love and its sickness, and would make occasion to slip away to Marta and talk of her life at the Grapevine before Escobar came. Out of sheer kindness she would recall hunting exploits of Mascado's, of which the older woman was greedy. There was much gossip of a hero-making sort afloat concerning him at Carmelo, where the Padres kept the smoke of incense going all day, increased the service of the mass, and had serious thoughts of attaching a penance to the singing of native songs. But the time drew on to the dark of the moon, when no dog howls and wolves will not run in a pack. The stir and the singing died, women grinding at the quern began to lift a hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

The soldiers were reported still following the cattle thieves, who were retreating eastward. Then came the news of a skirmish near the Arroyo Seco in which three soldiers were killed and two hurt. A few only of the cattle were recovered, for the Indians had parted them in three



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bands and gone up from Soledad by divers trails. Many of the marauders had guns, for which it was surmised the Russian traders would be paid in the hides of stolen beeves. This was stirring news for a lotus-eating land. A new detachment from the Presidio got off at once; Castro himself rode at the head of it. This satisfied a public sentiment, and his own sense of the seriousness of his position, which was great. It touched his honor to leave no loose ends of mutiny in his jurisdiction, since he had applied for and expected his honorable retirement. He drew heavily on the military resources of the province, and got away with twenty men provisioned for a month.

Saavedra came hurrying home from the north, and the same day came to him Delgado with his story of the wedding at San Antonio, and Pascual Escobar, ridden up from Las Plumas, demanding his brother from all the four winds. Word of Isidro's imprisonment and other extraordinary doings had penetrated so far, and the young man was jealous of the credit of his house. Saavedra put him off with soothing words until he had revolved how much of Isidro's story could be told

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in fairness to all parties, and in the interim several things happened.

Affairs moved on much the same for Jacinta except that the lieutenant's wife sat with her evenings when Delgado came in with his guitar, and she, loving a lover as do most ladies, egged on the match with practiced art. Delgado was beginning to imagine himself vastly in love. Jacinta stirred a little to practice on him the arts in which she lacked no tutoring from her dueña.

Then Fray Demetrio, who had heard of this hedged young beauty whom one had no more than a glimpse of as she passed with her father in the promenade, bethought himself of sundry past kindnesses on the part of the lieutenant's wife, and made a ghostly call. The man was at all times inordinately curious, and had a fine taste for ladies' looks.

"She is not to be seen, brother, I assure you," said the dueña; "the Comandante was most strict; but to one of your holy calling, and an old friend — and you knew her mother, you say" — You may judge what exchange of compliments



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had gone to the visit up to this point. "Well," said the lady, "when we cross the patio to look at the Castilian roses, look behind the vine there; we call it Jacinta's vine. That is she with her needlework lying in her lap. It is always so, I assure you, when I am not by. Look now and tell me if the likeness is as striking as reported."

Fages looked, choked, spluttered, came near to having an apoplexy, but had the wit to keep his tongue in guard.

"Ah!" cried the lady at the outer gate, "you find the resemblance extraordinary. So the Señor Comandante says."

"Extraordinary, my dear lady, is not the word; it is miraculous; not a feature lacking, even to the bent bar of her brows."

"But surely," said the lady as she let him out, "the eyebrows she has from her father. So I have understood."

Fray Demetrio went straight to Delfina. When those two worthies had their heads together there was sure to be gossip afoot. Within three hours Delfina came bustling about the quarters on a

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dozen well-devised errands, pertinacious as a wasp until she had a good look at the Comandante's daughter, and went out humming with her news. By nightfall most matrons in the town knew that there was a reasonable supposition that Doña Jacinta was the same slim lad seen lurking about the Mission a month gone, with Señor Isidro Escobar, the same who had been carried off by an Indian, run after by one young man and brought home by another. By the next day they were sure of it, by the second it had reached the lieutenant's wife and Pascual Escobar.

Pascual flounced off to Saavedra in a great fume. He felt the occasion demanded that he should fight somebody; not Saavedra, since he was a priest, nor Jacinta, for she was a lady; but when Padre Vicente had told him the whole story as far as it was known to him, Pascual concluded it must be Delgado. From the start he would have taken to the young man immensely for his fine airs and sumptuous dress; had copied both and lost all his money to him at cards; but in view of what he purposed toward Isidro,—



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nothing less than possession of his wife, — Delgado had rather shrugged off an intimacy with the elder brother.

Pascual found the young man in front of his lodging, fixing his saddle in perturbation, with scant allowance for courtesies.

"A word with you, señor," cried Escobar.

"Another time, señor; I have business in hand."

"I also, señor; my business is with you."

"I pray you hold me excused. I go upon a journey of great urgency."

"You shall go upon a longer one if you do not hear me speedily. My business is the duello. Will you fight?"

"With you? Wine of Christ! Yes, when I return, if your affair has not passed off in vaporings by that time." Delgado sprang to the saddle and struck into a tearing gallop. Escobar galloped after and drew level.

"Señor, I challenge you. You offend. You are courting my brother's wife. Will you fight?" The wind of their speed took the words out of his mouth.

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"The devil!" cried Delgado. "You have heard that story!"

"I say again," panted Pascual, "will you fight?"

"Señor, can you ride?"

"Ride, ride!" cried Escobar. "Judge if I can ride." He cut his horse cruelly with the quirt and tore ahead. Delgado used the spur and came up with him.

"Then ride, señor, for if we make not good speed this day I know not how long you may have a brother. And as for his wife, I believe she has gone in search of him."

"Explain, explain!" cried Pascual, the words pounded out of him by the jar of their riding.

"Word has come to me that Don Isidro is in captivity with the Indians. His wife, if wife she is, is not to be found. I think she has gone to find him. The woman Marta is with her. I go to Castro. Now will you fight or ride?"

"Ride, ride," gasped Pascual, "if it is as you say, and afterward if need be we will fight."

"Have it so," said Delgado; and after that they saved their breath, and lent their minds to



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the speed of the horses. They kept a running pace until they struck rising ground.

News of Isidro's detention in the camp of the renegades had come to Monterey from Soledad, where it was made known by a captive taken at Arroyo Seco. Marta had carried it straight to Jacinta.

"Sing, my bird of the mountain," she said. "I have a word for you. He is neither faithless nor unkind." Guess how the girl hugged that news, nursing it against her heart till it was warm with hope. Marta had known how to put tidings in a fruitful shape. She waited for the pang and the cry that followed in the wake of joy.

"But, Marta," she said, "Mascado?"

"What of him?" said the older woman.

"He is there with the Indians, next to the chief, you said. He will kill Señor Escobar."

"He will not dare," said the mother of Mascado.

"Ah, but you do not know. When we came away from Las Chimineas, as I have told you, when my — when Señor Escobar had taken him

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with the riata and bound him, he looked at us as we rode away, — such a look! There he sat with his back to the tree and his knife on the rock before him; he looked from that to Señor Escobar and back again as if he would have drawn them together with his eyes, so great was his hate. There was death in his look. Ah, Marta, tell me what I shall do."

"But he has not killed him yet," said Marta.

"You do not know; the news is a week old. Mascado may not have seen him yet; they say the Indians are in three camps." The girl wrung her hands.

"Mascado would not dare," said his mother again.

But Jacinta fell to crying softly without noise or sobbing; then she would sit drawing counsel from her hope, and afterward the flood of grief would grow full and drip over in unrelieving tears. Marta made her *chili relLENos* for dinner, green peppers stuffed with cheese and fried, but the girl would take no comfort in them. So at last when the sun had licked up the shadow like damp from the patio, and the whole town lay



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a-doze, Marta took the girl's hands between her palms and said her last word.

"Fret no more, my Briar," she said, "I will go and speak with my son."

"How will you go, Marta?"

"I can get a horse, and if any meet me in the hills I will say I seek my son. Mascado is a captain. They will not hurt me."

"But how will you know where he is?"

"I have a word, — a bird of the air brought it; never fear."

"And when you find him what will you do?"

The daughter of a chief drew herself up.

"What becomes me," she said.

"Ah, Marta, take me with you!"

"Most beautiful, what will you do in the hills?"

"I will go to my husband."

"There is war in the hills, and the tribes are bitter against the *gente de razon*."

"But if I am of the *gente de razon* I am also Indian bred. Seventeen years I myself knew no better." With such debates she followed the elder woman from room to room.

"What will your father say?" said Marta.



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"What will he say to you whom he commanded not to leave me?" demanded the girl.

"Will you that I stay?"

"Ah no, no, — only take me with you."

There was another reason why Jacinta wished to get away from Monterey, one as deep as her desire and more inarticulate. By dint of many hints from the lieutenant's wife, the point of Delgado's compliments grew plain to her. Now she saw her father's drift, and what prompted his ire against Escobar. That tie dissolved, Delgado was to have her, to which her own quietude under her father's suggestion had in a measure committed her. All the simplicity of her forest breeding, which denies the approach of marriage to any feet but love's, and perhaps a wraith from Ysabel's unhappy grave, rose up to warn her dumbly. But it lay too deep for complaining; she could sense it, but not give it speech. All that afternoon she avoided her dueña and the needlework under plea of a headache, that she might find Marta among the cooking pots and pans, and with arms folded on the elder woman's knees make argument and persuasion.